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### The inner desire for the understanding

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Laura Candiottio<sup>1</sup>

## **Preface.**

### **The inner desire for the understanding**

Curiosity, inquisitiveness, wonder, intellectual courage, grit, and perseverance are some of the emotions and dispositions that we experience in conjunction with epistemic processes such as inquiring, learning, remembering, and understanding. These states, which have been called “epistemic emotions”, seem to have a causal and perhaps conceptual connection with knowledge and various processes related to knowing. In addition, some dispositions, such as love of truth or respect for good arguments, seem to be part of a desirable epistemic character.

The aim of this monographic issue is to investigate the epistemic role of these emotions, affective experiences, and dispositions. This means discussing ongoing approaches to the role of emotions in rational processes and dispositions, as well as drawing connections between affective experiences, rationality, and cognition. This emerging line of investigation is ripe for renewed research because, until recently, few works have been dedicated to the topic, and even the existence of such kind of emotions is still controversial in the contemporary debate.

Neuroscientists have recently discovered the integrated functionality between emotions and cognition. Many of them now understand emotions as a constitutive element of human rationality; rather than framing emotions in opposition to rationality, these researchers argue that emotions ground the creation of concepts, facilitate deliberation, and partake in the various cognitive processes.

Meanwhile, the topic of emotions has caught the attention of philosophers in various subfields – not only because it addresses important questions for current debates in epistemology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science, but also because the affective dimension

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<sup>1</sup> Laura.Candiottio@ed.ac.uk.

of knowledge seems to be at the ground of the same practice of philosophy. For the Greeks, philosophy meant the “love of wisdom” (*philosophia*), as this affective disposition towards knowledge that generates an interest in understanding and in the methods to attain it. This meaning of philosophy as an inner desire for understanding has disseminated through the history of the ideas, and it is recognizable in, for example, the works of very philosophers as different as Plato, Augustine, Avicenna, Baruch Spinoza, Blaise Pascal, Max Scheler, and María Zambrano, only to name a few.

This monographic issue comprises ten essays, five in English and five in Italian.

The notion of “epistemic emotions” is addressed in Laura Candiotta’s essay, *Epistemic emotions. The building blocks of intellectual virtues*, through a deep and engaging discussion of Adam Morton’s account. Candiotta frames her thesis within virtue epistemology, depicting the process that leads from epistemic emotions to intellectual virtues, and from them to affective abilities. For the author, in fact, epistemic emotions are building blocks of intellectual virtues, as their motivational and transformative components, leading to the moral enhancement of the agent as a responsible epistemic agent.

The attitudinal theory of emotions has been chosen by Silvia Vaccarezza as the framework for understanding the epistemic role of moral emotion. In her precise and clear essay, *A guide to moral knowledge. The epistemic role of moral emotions*, Vaccarezza argues for the objective status of the evaluative properties disclosed by moral emotions. A list of epistemic moral emotions is provided, disclosing new paths of investigation into this intriguing field at the intersection of epistemology and ethics.

Michael Brady’s paper, *Social cognition of negative emotions*, brings the discussion into the social dimensions of cognition, analyzing the epistemic value of negative emotions. Negative emotions are in fact the main focus of his insightful inquiry into the nature of suffering and its value. In order to explain emotional suffering, Brady analyses in detail bodily suffering. In so doing, he discloses the significance of studying the bodily experience of emotional states – in particular facial expression of pain and suffering – for properly understanding the social and epistemic value of recognising the other’s suffering.

In *Twenty-first century perspectivism. The role of emotions in scientific inquiry*, Mark Alfano addresses the topic from the point of view

of scientific practice, arguing that some or all emotions are required, or at least recommended, in scientific inquiry. In his enthusiastic answer, Alfano depicts the scientific attitude as emotion-motivated inquiry, taking those geniuses who have achieved many of the most significant scientific advances to be motivated by their emotions as exemplary scientists.

The essay *Michael Polanyi and the roles of emotion in natural science* by Richard Allen gives us a hint into the epistemic role of the emotions for scientific inquiry, through an analysis of the life and thoughts of Michael Polanyi. The scientist distinguished three functions of emotion in science, the selective, the heuristic, and the persuasive. Analysing these functions, Allen explains why they sustain the effort of discovery, arguing for the essential role of emotions for scientific inquiry.

While positive emotions urge us to seek answers to our scientific questions, a certain level of dissatisfaction seems to be required to urge the agent to seek a deeper understanding. The elegant essay *Domande scientifiche e pulsione mistica. Wittgenstein, Freud e Lacan al di là del principio di piacere* (*Scientific questions and mystic drive. Wittgenstein, Freud and Lacan beyond the principle of pleasure*) by Stefano Oliva analyses this kind of epistemic dissatisfaction through an engaging comparison with the psychoanalytic concept of “drive”. The essay brings the readers through an analysis that moves from Ludwig Wittgenstein to Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

Also Luca Marchetti’s paper, *L’anticipazione cognitiva delle emozioni. Reazioni primitive e grammatica nella riflessione di Ludwig Wittgenstein* (*Emotions’ cognitive anticipation. Primitive reactions and grammatics in Wittgenstein*) focuses on Wittgenstein’s thought, but his analysis is dedicated to the discussion of the expressivist theory of emotions. In his skillful and precise analysis of some sections of the *Remarks on the philosophy of psychology*, Marchetti describes Wittgenstein’s criticism of the reduction of emotions both to bodily feelings and to behaviors. The author argues that the value of emotions does not reside in a causal role towards knowledge, but that they function as attentional patterns for a possible knowledge.

In *Sulle emozioni epistemiche. Una prospettiva estetica e un’esegesi genealogica attraverso le Confessiones di Agostino nella lettura di Martin Heidegger* (*On epistemic emotions. An aesthetic perspective and genealogy exegesis through Heidegger’s reading of Augustine Confessiones*), Erasmo Silvio Storace invites the reader to follow

Heidegger's lectures on Augustine to grasp the epistemic value of certain emotions as fear and hope. His refined analysis discloses a meaning of epistemic emotions at the intersection between cognition and volition, ascribing to this relation the function to lead the subject to action.

Alfonso Di Prospero, in his essay *Conoscenza, emozioni e struttura dell'intersoggettività. Riflessioni sulla figura del servo e del signore in Hegel* (*Knowledge, emotions and structure of intersubjectivity. Reflections on Hegel's master-slave dialectics*), introduces the important topic of the relation between knowledge and power, and specifically between knowledge and fear, through an anthropological interpretation of Hegel's thought. Fear is understood as an intersubjective property, and the intriguing and insightful references to Bateson's system theory provides the paper with a very original taste.

The monographic issue ends with Chiara Dolce's essay, *Lacrime universali, lacrime culturali: il pianto come privilegio dell'essere uomini* (*Universal tears, cultural tears. Tears as a privilege of being humans*). Using both the instruments that derives from philosophical anthropology and cultural anthropology, Dolce discloses the epistemic value of crying, as a human privilege to make moral choices beyond animality.

The authors whose contributions appear in this volume approach the topic from different perspectives. To some the topic reveals important aspects about the subjective dimension embedded in the practice of knowledge; for others the topic discloses intriguing perspectives on the capacities of our minds, or into the abilities required for knowing. Some are bent on finding connections between this topic and other fields, such as ethics, anthropology, education, and science; others find inspiration from the way this topic is questioned in the history of philosophy. This plurality of perspectives is welcome, not only because it provides evidence of the fertility of the topic, but also because it opens up new lines of investigation. In particular, I think that one of the innovative topics that is recognizable in many of these collected essays is that we should also study those emotions that do not immediately seem to have an epistemic value, mostly because they are negative emotions connected to certain levels of suffering. Our auspice is, thus, that this monographic issue may act as a stimulus for pursuing new research in this intriguing topic that asks us to re-consider the taxonomy of positive and negative emotions in re-

lation to the practice of knowing, broadening the list of epistemic emotions.

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